

of liberty and community. That is the noble challenge that you face.

Henry Ford once defined obstacles as those frightful things you see when you take your eyes off the goal. I hope your goal will be a 21st century American community that derives every benefit from technology while holding fast to our oldest values. I hope you will not take your eyes off of it. I hope you will embrace it and work for it. If you do, you will achieve it. And you will live in history's most exciting, prosperous, and humane era. That is what I wish for you.

Congratulations, good luck, and God-speed.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:15 p.m. in the Convention Center. In his remarks, he referred to William E. Shelton, president, and James Comer, professor, Eastern Michigan University; Mayor Dennis W. Archer of Detroit, MI; former Gov. James J. Blanchard of Michigan; and Myra Jodie, student, Steamboat Navajo Nation. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

### **Remarks at the NAACP Fight for Freedom Fund Dinner in Detroit, Michigan**

*April 30, 2000*

Thank you. Well—I don't know what to say. *[Laughter]* I will tell you that this magnificent work of African art will be up in our residence at the White House before I go to bed tonight. I thank you for it.

Reverend Anthony, thank you for an introduction the likes I have never had and never will have again. *[Laughter]* Thank you for spreading the caring arms of this branch of the NAACP from East Grand Boulevard all the way to Africa. *[Laughter]* And thank you for being my true friend.

Thank you all, ladies and gentlemen, for honoring Secretary Cuomo. I am delighted that he and his wife, Kerry, are here with me, and he deserves the honor you gave him. You know, he and Secretary Slater make me look good every day. *[Laughter]* And too often I get the credit when they deserve more. I thank them for being here.

I thank Thurgood Marshall, Jr., for being here; Maria Echaveste, all the people from

the White House that prove the truth that we have given you an administration that looks like America. I thank all your elected Representatives who are here for their support and solidarity with the NAACP. Thank you, Governor Engler, Senator Levin, Senator Abraham, Congressman Dingell, Congresswoman Kilpatrick. Congresswoman Stabenow, thank you for running and proving that you believe in democracy. And thank you, thank you, thank you, my friend John Conyers, and thank you for giving him the award that he so richly deserves.

Thank you, Mayor Dennis Archer, and thank you, Trudy, for being Hillary's friend and my friend for so many years. Long before you were a mayor, back when you were a judge and above such things as petty politics, we were friends. *[Laughter]* I have enjoyed watching the success of Detroit and enjoyed helping on occasion you to contribute to it. I thank you all.

I bring you—I also want to offer my condolences to the family and many friends of Bill Beckham, who passed away last week, who devoted his life to improving the lives of others in this great city. And I bring you greetings from two people who are not here: the First Lady, Hillary, who said she wished she could be here, but she is otherwise occupied in New York tonight; and the Vice President, who is otherwise occupied somewhere in America tonight, who loved being here.

Now, I am told this is the largest sit-down dinner anywhere in the whole world. And I can honestly say, it's the only one I've ever attended that had four head tables—*[laughter]*—the only one I've ever attended when I didn't shake hands with everyone at the head tables—*[laughter]*—and I learned tonight that I was the first sitting President ever to attend this great banquet. I will say this: If this encounter gets anything like the press coverage it deserves, I am quite certain I will not be the last President to be at this banquet tonight.

More than anything else, I came tonight to say a simple thank you. Thank you for being my friends; thank you for being there for me in good times and bad; thank you for being there in our journey to help America go forward together.

For more than 90 years now, the NAACP has been America's friend, the conscience of a nation struggling and too often failing to live up to its ideals, challenging always all of us to look into the mirror, to face our faults and right our wrongs. I have proceeded these last 7 years and 3 months with a simple philosophy that I believe is your philosophy: I believe everybody counts, everybody should have a chance, everybody has a role to play, and we all do better when we help each other.

Dr. King once said our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter. The NAACP has never been silent about the things that matter, and the life of this organization is just beginning. For all the progress we have made together, there is still much to do.

I am grateful for your support and the role you and your work have played in the progress we have made together for America. I am grateful that we have the lowest unemployment and welfare rates in 30 years, the lowest poverty rates in 20 years, the lowest minority unemployment ever recorded, the lowest female unemployment in 40 years, the highest homeownership in history, and the longest economic expansion in history. I am grateful for that.

I am grateful that under the Vice President's leadership, we've created empowerment zones in Detroit and many other cities and set up community financial institutions to loan money to people that couldn't get loans otherwise, and done so many other things. I am grateful for that. I am grateful that we have a healing social fabric, that the homicide rate is the lowest in 30 years and gun crime's down 35 percent, and adoptions are up 30 percent. I am grateful for all of that. I am grateful that 21 million Americans have taken family and medical leave and that 5 million families have benefited from our HOPE scholarship to help pay for college.

I am grateful that 150,000 young Americans, including at least one I saw here tonight, have served our country in AmeriCorps in their communities. I am grateful that over 90 percent of our children are immunized for the first time from serious childhood diseases, and 95 percent of our schools are hooked up to the Internet, as

compared with 16 percent when the Vice President and I set out to hook them all up 6 years ago. I'm grateful for all that.

I'm grateful that, as Wendell said so much more eloquently than I could, we have appointed more minorities and women to more positions in the Government and on the bench than any administration in history by a good long ways. I'm grateful for that.

I am profoundly touched by your prayers, your friendship, and your support. I reminded Secretary Slater when Reverend Anthony was up here preaching—[laughter]—that I went home with him last week to a memorial service for Daisy Bates, the great Arkansas heroine of the civil rights movement who shepherded those nine children through Little Rock Central High School 43 years ago and who just died a few months ago. Daisy's minister, Reverend Rufus Young, who is a gentleman way up in his eighties, with a frail walk, with a strong voice, got up and looked up at me and he said, "Mr. President, the only reason you've survived is that so many of us black folks were praying for you so hard." [Laughter]

What I hope now is we will turn our prayers and energies toward tomorrow. For when people gather together, even though it's important to remember the past, in my wife's words, it's even more important to imagine the future. And I guess what I would like to ask you is, in this millennial election season, as a citizen—forget about party, forget about anything else—what do you as a human being believe that America should be doing?

I have waited a long time for my country to be in the position to create the future of our dreams for our children. I watched for a long time America just being paralyzed by these assumptions of what we could not do. When I got elected President, I think most people thought we could never get rid of the deficit, much less run a surplus, but we have. I think most people thought the crime rate would always go up and never go down. But it's gone down for 7 years in a row now. I think most people thought that people on welfare didn't really want to work. But that turned out to be wrong. Almost 7 million have moved out of welfare. They were wrong about that.

I think most people thought a lot of things couldn't get better. And now we don't have any excuses, because we know when we get together and work together, things can get better. And so what I want to ask you is, what do you propose to do about it?

A great country can make mistakes not only when times are tough but when times are good. I look out here in this sea of faces, and I wonder how many thousand stories there are here tonight—stories of triumph and heroism and struggle against the odds to overcome some racial or economic or other handicap—how many of you have lost a loved one to violence or other tragedies. And now, what I want to say to you is: We know things can be better; what do you propose to do about it?

We have choices to make. I believe that we should keep on going with this economic recovery until we have brought economic opportunity to all those neighborhoods, all those little rural towns, all those Indian reservations, all those people who have still been left behind and don't know there's been a recovery because they haven't felt it. And we can do it now in a way that we've never been able to do before.

I believe we should keep going until all of our children understand how to use computers and can make the most of it. I believe we should keep going until we find a way to guarantee health care rights to all Americans who are willing to work and do the right thing or who need help because they can't. I believe we should keep going until every American who wants to can go to college.

Let me tell you something else a lot of people don't know; even a lot of African-Americans don't know this. Last year, for the first time in history, the percentage of African-Americans graduating from high school equaled the percentage of the white majority children graduating from high school. Now, we ought to keep going until the percentage going on to college equals that and then the percentage graduating. But we have to open the doors of college to everyone.

We've made a lot of progress, but we've got more to do. And we've got more to do in so many other areas. I just want to mention two more before I leave. One is, in this whole business of sharing the bounty of America's

public service. You know, I never thought about this in the way—my appointment of people of color and lots of women to important positions—in the way most people think about it. I always figured we'd do a better job if our Government was more representative of the rest of the people in the country. I always thought we would make better decisions. I always thought empowering people and communities was a positive good. I never thought it was something I was doing for somebody else. I just thought I was trying to make democracy work.

And we made a lot of progress. But I want you to know, there's one real problem we've still got that directly affects Michigan. When it comes to appointing judges, the United States Senate is not doing what it ought to be doing, especially with regard to women and minority appointees.

Hey, I need your help on this. A blue ribbon study found that during the 105th Congress, women and minority judicial nominees took much longer to be considered than white males. It found that minority nominations failed at a much higher rate than the nominations of whites. Last year there was a disgraceful rejection of an African-American State supreme court judge from Missouri named Ronnie White, solely on the basis of party politics.

I have nominated two people from Michigan to the sixth circuit, and neither one of them have even gotten a hearing so far. Judge Helene White, a highly qualified Michigan appellate judge, has been waiting for a hearing from the Senate Judiciary Committee for 3 years, longer than any other pending nominee.

My other sixth circuit nominee, Kathleen McCree Lewis, the daughter of Wade McCree, is here tonight. She would become the first African-American woman ever to serve on the sixth circuit. I think the Senate ought to give Helene White and Kathleen McCree Lewis hearings. Vote them up or down. Tell the American people how you stand. Let us hear from you. Don't hide behind having no hearing.

I had to work and work and work to get a distinguished Hispanic judge and a female attorney appointed out in California. They made him wait 4 years. Now, why did they

do that? Because they didn't want to put him on the court. They just didn't want you to know they didn't want to put him on the court. [Laughter] So if you don't want to do something, but you don't want the people to know you don't want to do something, instead of saying no, you just never get around to it. [Laughter]

Now, we're going to have a new election in November. And we'll have a new President and a new Senate, and I hope a new House, with John as the Chairman of the House Judiciary Committee. But I want you to know this: I am proud of the fact that my party has never been guilty of delaying nominees to this extent and particularly putting the burden on women and people of color. And it's a shame, and we ought to do something about it. And I hope you'll help me do something about it.

Now, let me just mention one other thing, because we have lots of choices this year. You will have choices about whether to keep on changing in accord with this economic policy and bringing everybody into it while we keep paying down the debt, investing in education, give families tax cuts we can afford, or going back to the economic policy we had before I came in, with even bigger tax cuts that, once I get out of office, would benefit primarily people like me. [Laughter] But we won't have any money for education, and we'll start running deficits again.

We'll have choices about education policy, health policy, environmental policy, a lot of other things. But I want you to think about the things that we choose that really define us as a community. John Conyers talked about one. I'm proud that gun crime is down 35 percent. Anybody that thinks that America is safe enough is free to walk out on my speech right now. But we know we can make America safer, and we know the best way to do it is by preventing crime in the first place. That's why we want to close the gun show loophole and do other things to keep guns out of the hands of children and criminals. That's why we want more community police on the street. That's why we want more after-school and summer school programs for our kids, to give them something to say yes to.

But when three-quarters of the people in the penitentiary are people of color and they're more likely to be in the penitentiary than they are to go to college, there's something wrong still. I don't think we've done as much we can. I think we can make America safer and have more of our kids going to college at the same time. But we have a choice to make.

I think we ought to pass the hate crimes legislation. There are still people in this country who are shot, who are abused, who are killed because of their race, their religion, just because they're gay. We've seen it over and over again—tragically. We saw it just this week: Five people in a suburb of Pittsburgh shot and killed for no other reason, it appears, than the color of their skin or the way they worship God.

Now, you will hear all kinds of arguments about this hate crime business, but I have studied this. It is simply not true that we do not need national legislation making hate crimes against people, because of race or because of sexual orientation or because of disability or because of religion, a Federal crime. We do.

And I have looked into the eyes of the brother and the sister of that Filipino postal worker that was gunned down in California. I have seen one of those little Jewish children that was wounded, and his family, at that community center in Los Angeles. I have talked to the widow of the African-American former basketball coach at Northwestern who was shot walking in his neighborhood. I have put my arms around the parents of Matthew Shepard, who was stretched out on a rack in Wyoming because he was gay. And I have seen the brother and sister of James Byrd, who was dragged to death in Texas because he was black.

Now, if we want to be one America and we don't want any politics in it, the easiest way that we can do that is to join hands and unanimously say, "We can argue about a lot of things, but one thing we're never going to argue about again is our common humanity. Here is this hate crimes bill. It is who we are. It is what we stand for. It is what we believe."

You know, we do have a lot of bridges to cross. As long as there are people without

economic opportunity and we can give it to them, we ought to do it. As long as there are people who don't have access to world-class education and we can give it to them, we ought to do it. As long as there are working families who can't take care of their children, we ought to do it. As long as there—we ought to give them child care support and access to health care they can afford. We ought to do these things.

There are so many challenges out there, but the main thing I want to tell you is this: If the good Lord came to me tonight when I walked out of this room and said, "Mr. President, now I'm not going to let you serve the end of your term. I'm taking you home tonight, and I'm not genie. I'm not going to give you three wishes, but I will give you one. What do you want?" I would wish for our country to be truly one America.

I would wish for us to be able—you know, I have—you may have heard me tell this story on television, but I'm going to tell it one more time. I have got, on a table in the Oval Office—when you see me there with a world leader, and you see two chairs and two big couches and a table there—right on that table, you look next time—standing on that table in a vacuum-packed glass container is a rock that Neil Armstrong took off the Moon in 1969. That rock is 3.6 billion years old. And when people come in to see me, and they get all riled up, and they get all mad at each other, and they're thinking about little things, and they're all torn up and upset, ever since I've got that, I say, "Wait a minute, look at that rock. You see that rock? That is 3.6 billion years old. Now chill out. We're all just passing through here." [Laughter]

And I say that to remind you that, whether you're President of the United States or somebody serving us this dinner tonight, the most important things about us are not the differences between me and the people serving you dinner but the things we have in common.

And when life is all said and done, the stories we really will be thinking about in our last moments were who liked us and who loved us and what moved us and the springtimes we remember and the moments of personal drama and courage and meaning that came into our lives. The purpose of pub-

lic life, the purpose of citizenship, the purpose of the NAACP is to give people a sense of our common humanity and our common cause. You know, Wendell said that I learned that from my grandparents, and that's true. But I learn it every day, from all the stories of all the people I see.

You have given me a memory tonight I will never forget. Your support has meant more to me than I can ever say. The people of Detroit and the State of Michigan have been with me through thick and thin. But the only thing that really matters now is, what are you going to do tomorrow? What do you propose to do with this magic moment?

Let me tell you this: The last time we had an economy this good was in the 1960's. We broke the record of the 1960's for economic expansions. There are a lot of young children here who weren't alive back then, but I was. And I graduated from high school in 1964 in the middle of that great economic expansion, low unemployment, low inflation, high growth, everything booming. We thought the civil rights problems would be handled in Congress and the courts. We never dreamed we'd be caught up in Vietnam. We thought we would win the cold war, no sweat. We thought we were on automatic, marching into the future. And what happened? What happened?

Within 4 years, when I graduated from college, it was 2 days after Senator Kennedy was killed, 2 months after Martin Luther King was killed, 9 weeks after President Johnson, the great civil rights President, couldn't even run for reelection because the country was so divided over Vietnam. And within a few months, the longest economic expansion in history was itself history.

Life is fleeting. Things change. I have been waiting for 35 years, not as President, as an American citizen, for my country to be in the position you're in tonight, to build the future of our dreams for our children. That should be the mission of the NAACP in this millennial year.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:10 p.m. in the Cobo Convention Hall. In his remarks, he referred to Rev. Wendell Anthony, president, NAACP Detroit Branch; Gov. John Engler of

Michigan; and Mayor Dennis W. Archer of Detroit, MI, and his wife, Trudy.

**Proclamation 7299—Asian/Pacific American Heritage Month, 2000**

*April 29, 2000*

*By the President of the United States of America*

**A Proclamation**

Over the last two centuries, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders have contributed immeasurably to the richness of our dynamic, multicultural society. Whether recent immigrants or descendants of families who have been here for generations, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders embody many of our Nation's core values, including devotion to family, commitment to hard work, and pride in their heritage.

The people of this diverse and rapidly growing community have contributed to every aspect of our national life—from engineering and computer science to government, the arts, and sports. For example, Vinod Dahm helped to revolutionize computer technology through the invention of the pentium chip. Governors Benjamin Cayetano of Hawaii and Gary Locke of Washington have devoted their lives to public service. The talents of novelist Amy Tan have delighted readers across our Nation, while architect and sculptor Maya Lin's stirring memorials to the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights Movement have uplifted and inspired all who have experienced them. And diver Greg Louganis and football star Junior Seau have thrilled sports fans everywhere with their skill and athleticism.

While many Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders today are thriving, others are still struggling to overcome obstacles. Because of oppression in their countries of origin, some new immigrants have arrived without having completed their education; once here, some have encountered language and cultural barriers and discrimination. Pacific Islanders, too, must overcome barriers to opportunity caused by their geographic isolation and the consequences of Western influences on their unique culture. For these and other reasons, too many Asian Americans and Pacific Is-

landers face low-paying jobs, inadequate health care, and lack of educational opportunity.

To assist this community in meeting these challenges, last June I signed an Executive order establishing the White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. The Initiative's goal is to improve the quality of life for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders by increasing their participation in Federal programs—including health, human services, education, housing, labor, transportation, economic, and community development programs—which may not have served them in the past.

My Administration remains dedicated to building an America that celebrates and draws strength from its diversity. Let us use this month to reflect on the many gifts Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders have brought to our nation and embrace the contributions that Americans of all backgrounds make to our increasingly multicultural society.

To honor the accomplishments of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and to recognize their many contributions to our Nation, the Congress, by Public Law 102-450, has designated the month of May as "Asian/Pacific American Heritage Month."

**Now, Therefore, I, William J. Clinton,** President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim May 2000 as Asian/Pacific American Heritage Month. I call upon the people of the United States to observe this occasion with appropriate programs, ceremonies, and activities.

**In Witness Whereof,** I have hereunto set my hand this twenty-ninth day of April, in the year of our Lord two thousand, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-fourth.

**William J. Clinton**

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NOTE: This proclamation was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on May 1, and it was published in the *Federal Register* on May 3.